
HIL MALATINO
ON BEING TRANS
IN THIS MOMENT
the FINAL straw
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This week we are presenting Scott's interview with Hil Malatino, who is a current professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Philosophy at Penn State University. They are also the author of three books, *Trans Care, Queer Embodiment: Monstrosity, Medical Violence, and Intersex Experience*, and *Side Affects: On Being Trans and Feeling Bad*. Scott and Hil speak on many themes which are found in his books, plus lots more topics!

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Hil Matatino: So I'm Hil Malatino, I use he/him and also they/them pronouns. And I'm currently assistant professor of Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies, and Philosophy at Penn State University.

Scott: Well, I'm really excited to talk to you, specifically about the two books that you published in the last couple of years, *Trans Care*, and most recently, *Side Affects: On Being Trans and Feeling Bad.* I think both of these books really make helpful contributions to understanding trans experience collectively. So I want to talk about those books and also, I'm imagining, since it's such a terrible moment of trans antagonism and state violence, that we might bring some of that stuff into the discussion also.

But just to start out, I see your work fitting within current trans thought about the experience of transition over against the kind of like neoliberal identity politics that thinks of transness as an individual identity. Can you talk a bit about the factors that individualize transness, and then, sort of, your vision of like alternative, collective or social ways we might understand trans experience?

HM: Absolutely. A lot of my thinking about the importance of de-individuating the way we understand transition is routed through my research and trans medical archive specifically. So I've approached those archives with an eye towards communal resistance and intervention in relation to medical gatekeeping. And there's a real rich history — going back for probably as long as there has been such a thing as, like, a medical etiology of transness — of communal resistance to the gatekeeping that informs the diagnosis and the proposed treatment protocols for transness.

So what I've realized doing that archival work over the course of the last, probably over a decade, in fits and starts, is that the ability to transition, and the ability to transition outside of really rigid, Eurocentric, bourgeois, white and gendered norms, has been enabled through the pro-

testations of trans collectives and communities. And that is in really considerable tension with the historic strict medical model of transsexuality, and the trans treatment protocol that's been attached to that. That, you know, historically recommended that folks go deep stealth, relocate, start lives and new. And then later on, if not emphasizing what we now call "stealthness", they tended to, I think, really hyper-individuate the process of transition, where it was the sort of journey or rebirth that was undertaken by discrete and really atomized subjects, who were considered at least in the medical literature — and there are probably lots of reasons for this — any absence of communities that that enable those transitions.

So it just seemed like there was a, on the one hand: this history of trans collective resistance to medical gatekeeping that, I think, on the ground, in very real ways, has made transition possible for so many people. And then [on the other hand:] this medical narrative of what transition is about, and how one accesses it, that is very hyper individual. So I just have seen those histories' intentions, and I think in terms of trans experience and all its diversity, the former, this more collective understanding of how transitions happen, just seems more true, more accurate, to people's experiences.

S: Yeah, and one of the things you talked about in terms of medical interface that new trans people seeking hormones or surgeries, or whatever, faces...like, there's the one hand of trans people being kind of diagnosed with some kind of mental disorder, but also this makes us be seen as consumers of healthcare. And I wonder if you have any thoughts on that, like, the way that the medical industry kind of receives trans people. And then also how you see those medical narratives being taken on by trans people themselves a kind of transnormative way,

HM: I think it's really important to think about trans healthcare in relationship to the broader US healthcare system. And to the extent that trans subjects are interpolated as just consumers or, you know, patient customers of medical services...I think, to some extent, everybody is in the United States because of the way that our healthcare system has developed along this pretty strictly for profit model. So that's the first thing I want to say, right? My argument about trans folks as consumers, being positioned as consumers of medical services by the healthcare industry, or the medical industrial complex, might, in some respects, be specific to the

US, or at least a sort of unique to the United States, or maybe intensified in the United States in ways that might not be elsewhere.

But I think what we see with the history of trans healthcare is that for profit medical systems, spawning transition related procedures, is sort of like, niche markets for particular medical practitioners to exploit. And this has been specifically the case with different surgical practices and remains the case, is surgeons develop innovations, or some surgeons have better outcomes than others, and are then able to market those better outcomes in ways that enable them to to increase their prices, right? I mean, so there's this phenomenon of trans surgical procedures becoming a specialized niche in the medical community. And I think making some surgeons a lot of money, right? Surgeons with long wait lists that are relatively well known within trans communities for having good outcomes. And, yeah, I mean, it raises a lot of questions for me about how people access transition and the sort of lack of, really, radically democratic access to medical transition.

So it seems accessing medical transition becomes the sort of quest to marshal as many financial resources as possible so that one can receive decent treatment. And I think that that gets internalized in maybe unpredictable ways. But I think when folks begin to think about embarking upon transition, the stress and anxiety that attends it has a lot to do with how financially inaccessible, many transition related procedures, have been and remain. I'm rambling a bit, but I think that speaks a little bit to what you're asking.

S**: Yeah, and I mean in the beginning of Side Affects, you start reframing the idea of transition, and one of the things you look at is a kind of normative narrative that's presented, particularly on social media, by trans people themselves. It's like a goal-oriented understanding of transition, and you talk about how that doesn't actually reflect most trans people's access to hormones, for example, which can be intermittent, depending on health insurance and the area that you live in. So in response to this, you start talking about a different kind of understanding of transition that doesn't have a specific endpoint maybe, and you call this "interregnum". I thought this was a really cool idea of rethinking transition outside of medical definitions, cis expectations, and these these transnormative narratives. So I wonder if you could kind of unpack that concept and what you hope it would bring to trans people for understanding our own position and our own experiences?**

HM: Yeah, absolutely. There's this critique of transnormativity in *Side Affects*, and it's in some of my other work as well, doesn't come from me specifically. It's not something that I came up with, it's actually drawn from the work of trans-of-color scholars. I'm thinking specifically of Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn but also others who have really named the way that there's a certain sort of trafficking in these goal-oriented transition narratives that are predicated, to a certain degree, of economic privilege, of maybe geographic privilege, that's something we can think about, right? The fact that some people are located in areas where trans affirming care is easily accessible, or more easily accessible, and some people aren't, right? And also, of course, questions of racial stratification that inform economic access to medical transition. And then just questions of desire, right? I mean, the very different kinds of desires that some folks have or don't have for specific forms of medical and hormonal transition.

So that's why I critique transnormative narratives. And I think it's also important to point out that when one is beginning to access information about how to surgically and hormonally transition, those are the narratives that one is sort of inundated with immediately, right? [chuckles] Those are the ones that, like, you know, the "trans influencers" that are easiest to find are the ones that traffic in those narratives. And that's all good, and well for them. I have no bone to pick with them, but I think the social media landscape that folks encounter as they begin to think about transition is so steeped in transnormativity, that it's really important to point to it and say "this is not the only possibility for how to navigate transition."

The other thing that I wanted to mention that just really has informed my thinking about this — and I say this because I'm very mindful of the fact that you are in North Carolina, and I've spent years in East Tennessee, and in those — in southern Appalachia access to medical technologies of transition was very, very difficult to come by in a way that it's just not if you live in the Northeast or in a major metropolitan coastal city. That meant that most of the trans folks that I knew in southern Appalachia had intermittent relationships to hormone use, had real difficulty finding trans affirming primary care physicians, and also many of us, myself included, had specific trans exclusions on our insurance coverage, and could not afford to pay for medical transition out of pocket.

So my critique of transnormativity is rooted in that real experiential reality of myself and so many other trans folks I knew, not being able to access medical technologies of transition that we desired because of

real structural gatekeeping. It just seems like, if structural change is on the horizon — for some of us in terms of what a "radical trans politics'' might work towards — it's important to keep pointing to the specific structural phenomenon that still gate keep transition, even if there are way more trans affirming medical practitioners and then than there used to be.

So this idea of "the interregnum", which my partner is a medievalist, and a queer medievalist, so a very weird and delightful medievalist [Scott and Hil both laugh] but they've teased me about using the term "interregnum" because they're very familiar with it as a medievalist, and of course the way I use it is not that. But the idea of "the interregnum" in historical literature names the space that occurs between the rise and consolidation of state forms. So I'm like an old, I don't know, I've been reading Deleuze and Guattari for a long time since I was, I want to say, a baby, since I was like a teenager, and in my early 20s. And it seems to me that this emphasis on the space of possibility that exists between sort of sedimented state forms, spoke to the distinction that they made between the molar and the molecular.

So I started thinking — and I don't want to, like, we don't have to go into D and G for a long time [Hil laughs] — but I just thought like, "oh, there's something about the interregnum that could be a space of possibility that has something to do with more molecular forms of becoming, they don't have to do with the realization of like a stable gendered state, but instead put emphasis on questions of process and becoming in relationship to transition." That just seemed to me like a more capacious way of understanding transition, than this journey from, you know, a beginning point towards an endpoint. And I also don't really know about the temporality of that. Like, I don't know when transition started for me and I don't know if it's ever going to really end, you know, and that's personal. But I also have so many friends who I think would say something very similar, about transition.

S: I love all that you were saying. And there's even sometimes a retroactive aspect of transition, where you look back from your present lens and kind of reinterpret experiences that are from earlier times, from a different vantage point and be like "Oh, that makes a different kind of sense to me now than it did then, when I didn't have maybe the language to talk about it."

I like that you brought up desire, I'm thinking in this recent essay I read by Kadji Amin, he kind of defines trans people as people

who desire transition, and I thought that was a helpful way of thinking about it. Because putting it in relation to desire, and then that kind of process — but it's interesting, with that sort of social media landscape that you talk about, a lot of trans people have this common experience of like, being inundated with these images, and then sort of thinking like "am I trans enough, am I trans in the right way?" And I'm thinking about how this era for young people, there's way more information about transition and access to it, and sharing of resources that I didn't have as a kid. Like I didn't even have any understanding of this until I was already an adult. And I think that's great and I think that's why we see this uptick of trans people — which is like posing a real threat to society — but then there's also this weird kind of way that you can do this sort of internalized gatekeeping. And also maybe re-emphasize that kind of atomized or individualized version of it. Because I know young people transitioning without trans community in their real life at all.

I wonder if, I don't know, I'm not sure if this is really a question, but I'm wondering if you have thoughts about this kind of current landscape and how it's different for young trans people? And like, what are some of the dangers of that, and what are the positive aspects of it?

HM: I wonder, I have so many questions about what it's like to be a young trans person in this particular historical moment. It's hard for me, you know, I can't speak for that positionality, I came of age in the 90's [laughs]. So that's the landscape I'm familiar with. I think that trans folks, or prototrans folks — or maybe we can think about this just in relationship to folks that are, like, gender and sexually non normative more broadly — I feel like we often find each other even if we don't really know that that's what we're seeking out or finding when we're young. That may not necessarily be conscious, right, but it tends to happen. And I think that that's probably still the case, right? I would wager. So even if there are trans youth that are navigating or thinking about transition, in the absence of a community that they might be able to point to and say "this is a trans community", or "this is my trans community", I think it's very likely that folks are connecting with other sorts of weird kids, teenagers, who are trans affirming, even if they're not necessarily cognizant of the fact that they are right. There's something that happens with youth that are non normative, where there are collectives and affinities and friendships that are built that are ultimately really sustaining, that may not look like a

"community" that are still really imperative.

I think that, while it's absolutely true that it's important to think about how to marshal community support for trans youth — especially in relationship to wave after wave of trans antagonistic attacks on the possibilities of youth to transition — I think the other thing that I've been trying to hold in my mind to balance that grim reality is the fact that friendships are always possible and are sustaining even in the context of really, really brutal forms of structural violence and gatekeeping. There's something about affinity and solidarity that is possible within friendship that's not necessarily possible in the context of "Community", with a capital C. Like there's something looser there that I think is actually more capacious.

The other thing I want to say, is that my colleague Erin Heidt-Forsythe and I have started — we're at the very beginnings of undertaking work on fertility preservation and trans youth, researching the medical apparatus that is attempting to ensure or make possible fertility preservation for trans youth — and something that we learned in the context of beginning that work was that at certain clinics in progressive cities that are working with trans youth, there's been this phenomenon of bringing in trans elders or trans adults to talk to trans youth about possibilities for family making, reproduction, kin making. And on the one hand, I think like, "Oh, that's really wonderful" because I would have loved to have a trans elder to talk to you about like reproductive capacity and family building when I was young.

On the other hand, the fact that that's happening through this space of the clinic, and specifically with an eye towards getting patients to consider paying for gamete freezing, right? It's like, "oh, that's, this is not the way I would like to see that happen". So I feel like having some sort of more robust way to have trans youth and have intergenerational trans dialogues, and support networks exist, would be very welcome, especially if it happened outside of institutions that had some sort of profit motive informing how they operate.

S: Yeah, that's really interesting. The thing about finding ways to preserve fertility for the future is — it's interesting because I see that sort of coming up more for younger trans people than it did for trans people coming of age in the 90's and early 2000's, which, in a way, I don't know, if that's like reaffirming some kind of normativity, but certainly, as you're pointing out, is helpful to different industries raising money

and kind of reaping benefits from trans people as consumers. Whether or not it is, that's separate from the desires that trans people have to have kids, which I think is great. Yeah, that was really interesting.

I wonder, since you brought up C. Riley Snorton, I had a question that I had sort of geared towards the end, but I kind of wanted to bring it in now. Just thinking about these dominant narratives of transness, there's simultaneously a kind of heavy racialization that we see of transness in the media, when it comes to spectacles of violence, right? Like the image of the Black trans woman as the victim of some kind of violence. But then I think there's also, perhaps, a kind of "whitening" of transness, and you talk about this relationship of transit and whiteness in specific community spaces of healing, at the end of Side Affects. In psychedelic healing communities, is where you're looking, and how sort of a white trans logic can reproduce forms of white supremacy under the guise of liberation and escape from that structure. So I would love to hear you talk a little bit about how transness gets whitened in the media or in sort of, perhaps, unconscious white supremacist logics for trans people who are trying to be antiracist. And how we might rethink transness from a kind of decolonial, or Black feminist lens, as you were mentioning before.

HM: It's so complicated, this nexus. And the last chapter of *Side Affects* is just the very beginning of my attempt to work through these questions of race, coloniality and healing practice. I want to start responding to this by situating myself, because I think that's really imperative. So, you know, white, settler born in upstate New York in the foothills of the Adirondacks, grew up in South Florida, and mentored by decolonial feminist philosopher Maria Lugones. So she very much informs my thinking about all of these questions, and is always in the background of whatever I happen to say on this topic. But I also want to mention that both of my parents were pretty committed to New Age spiritualities, or what I understood as forms of New Age spirituality. My mother was a student of Buddhism for most of her adult life. And my father is a musician and just an unrepentant lifelong stoner who grew up reading out loud to me from magazines about extraterrestrial life forms, and I think they took like an aura reading class together at the local community college when I was a kid. So I've always, in some ways, been steeped in forms of very, very white New Age spirituality that were sort of like hippie or post hippy, really from day one, right? That was always part of my domestic space growing up.

It became something that I argued with my family about as I as I got older, and specifically as I read more Black feminist and decolonial work. And the arguments started off being about appropriation, about questions of appropriation of spiritual traditions that are not white Eurocentric ones, right? But then there's also a real strong pagan throughline in thinking about the forms of New Age spirituality that I saw my parents and many other white leftist, sort of post 1960's leftists, taking up. And I have questions about that too, because there's this way in which it seems like the turn towards a kind of, maybe like a precolonial paganism is a way of imagining a cultural space that is sort of untainted by chattel slavery and by settler colonialality.

So it went beyond questions of appropriation for me, and I began to think about how this desire to recuperate things like Taro, on the part of white leftist and white queers and white trans folks, had to do with wanting to find a form of spiritual practice that is more pure, or less tainted by the violence of settler colonialality, and Christendom that comes along with that. On the one hand, I understand that recuperative desire. But on the other hand, if you look at some of the, specifically trans related material that has been published, that tarries with this really heteroclite ensemble of spiritual practices, there is this like, really troubling world historical narrative that emerges from it, that has to do with — and this is the case study that I talked about in the last chapter of the book — specifically a group that was based in western North Carolina in the late 90's, and early 2000's. And in their newsletters, and in their writings, you see, the development of this attempt to recuperate like a matriarchal goddess culture that was affirmative have multiple forms of embodiment, that was sort of prebinary gender and is being recuperated in a way that enables us to become like post binary gender.

There's also an evolutionary narrative that gets tied to that, where trans folks are this "avant garde", or I don't know, new radical evolutionary phenomenon that's going to usher in this — I wish I had the language in front of me of how this collective put it — but like a New World Order of peace and prosperity and tranquility, that is no longer informed by the violence of binary gender and the patriarchal logic that informs that. And that, it's a "just so" story, and it also enables folks who are pulling on these spiritual threads, to not think about their implication and current forms of racial colonial violence.

So that's, I don't know, I'm rambling. I know, I could go on about this for a long time. I encountered that material beginning when I was

a teenager and I was trying to come into some kind of spiritual practice my own that helped me deal with questions of queerness and transness. I just was initially and am still like "what the fuck is going on here?" I don't know. Why am I drawn to it, while at the same time finding certain aspects of it really repellent?

S: I mean, it seems like there's a particularly white version of a search for authenticity that kind of uses either a Black cultural expression or other kind of Indigenous cultural expression as its form. Which is totally ingrained within a kind of colonial logic, and the way that you show that in the book, like just looking at the makeup of the spaces, right? That they're talking about all this stuff and then everyone in the room is white. And so they're not actually threatened in any way out of their comfort zone of an all white space, and they can say whatever they want without really any repercussions. But I think it's interesting, because this does really connect with current social media trans, queer landscape, which is totally inundated with different versions of what we call "woo" [outlandishly spiritual or supernatural]. And I think there's really beautiful things and really troubling things there, too.

HM: I was just thinking about the legacy of that. If you look at queer movements that have tarried with questions of spirituality in the US specifically, I think one go to example is the radical fairies but if you look at the history of radical fairy spaces, they're overwhelmingly white and traffic in so many troubling appropriations of different kinds of Indigenous belief systems

S: Right.

HM: Yeah. So what's happening currently in the spaces of social media, around discourses on spirituality, I understand is very much connected to this post 1960's legacy of queer and trans spiritual searching that always partakes of these really troubling settler logics and appropriations.

S: Right. And I think what I see a lot in current thinking and writing by trans people, is sort of grappling with this moment where we're past the quote, unquote "tipping point" where there's way more visibility and representation of transness that is perhaps allowing more people to transition, but one of the maybe unintended consequences of that is

this sort of "fad" of being nonbinary, or like claiming nonbinaryness, or using they/them pronouns, but not really engaging in any kind of transition or troubling of the gender structure. So, I don't know, it's almost like trans people who maybe previously wanted this Big Tent idea, or trying to rethink what being trans means when you have that phenomenon of maybe not even really associating with any kind of material practice anymore, right? Just being like, "I'm nonbinary, and yet I dress the same as a man or woman is imagined to dress" or whatever. I don't know if you have any thoughts on that, that current moment of thinking, like, something became sort of popular in a way. Oh, yeah! And just the idea that if we say "we're nonbinary", we're doing something against the colonial gender system, even though, what does it do?

HM: Yeah, this is another Nexus that is so complicated, because I think immediately of the fact that this move to identify as non binary but not necessarily change anything in terms of your gender presentation, and not access hormones, or different forms of medical transition. On the one hand, I see how it can become sort of understood as faddish, but on the other hand, I've known so many people for whom that move was the beginning of a much longer process of transition too. So it's like who am I to parse out whether, you know, something really troubling and faddish is happening, or whether this is just the beginning of a much longer process? And maybe if it is "trendy" in certain sort of radical, queer spaces, to be nonbinary to be a "they/them", even though one appears entirely binary in most other respects, I want to think that it's possible that that's opening up more trans affirming space than it is shutting down trans affirming space.

So I don't know, my tendency is to be really generous about that. And I also think that questions of solidarity and affinity are way more important than questions of identity. Always. So it doesn't matter to me how somebody identifies in terms of the relationship to transness, if they understand themselves as trans in a nonmedically transitioning, nonhormonally transitioning sort of they/them way, or if they don't and if they very much embrace a sort of transsexual understanding of their transition, what matters more to me is the political work that they are doing, and the pedagogical work maybe that they are doing and how they comport themselves in spaces of community and collectivity. That seems more imperative.

S: You know maybe like 10-15 years ago gender queer was like the preliminary stage to trans transition. And now it's nonbinary. It could serve as a gateway for someone to...we've used the word "proto trans'' before too, right? It's like: that might be how you find other people, right? That gives you a sort of idea of how things could go. I think going from that, I want to talk about some of the more mundane, and also granular, experiences of tranness that you discuss in the book. One of the things, actually in *Side Affects* and in *Trans Care*, you talk about "misrecognition" or "unrecognition" as a fundamental experience of transness, negotiating how we're perceived, whether it's from people we don't know, or people we do know, and you talk about this as sort of a relational model of gender. Because this takes us away from identity, right? Like I'm trans, or whatever, I can say that, but transness happens in between people, and the other person can give us whatever gender we end up with, whether that's right or wrong. And you talk, from personal experience, in this really interesting way about a kind of nonbinary moment of misrecognition as being part of your own experience. I really liked that. So I just wanted to hear you talk about the moment of encounter as gendering but also these visions that you have for building other ways of seeing and witnessing each other, particularly among trans people.

HM: Yeah. I talk about the, the nonbinary form of recognition, which I think is also a form of misecognition and that's what makes it interesting. By talking, I think I use the phrase "pronomial stammering", so I was just thinking about those instances where you're encountering somebody, they assign one pronoun to you, and then you say something back to them and then they assign another pronoun to you, or apologize because they think they got it wrong the first time and now they're attempting to get it right. Those moments, in my biography — because I did actually identify for a long time is nonbinary and genderqueer and use they/them pronouns, this is also probably part of why I'm so generous with folks who find themselves inhabiting that space, because I was there for years, in large part because of gatekeeping around medical transition.

So it was easier to be a they/them if I couldn't pay for hormones and top surgery in social spaces than it was to insist on he/him in those spaces of recognition. So I say that because in those moments of pronomial stammering that just felt like they were dramatizing what always happened in terms of the way that gender recognition had circulated in my

life. So there was something that was truer about the stammering than just the assignation of a pronoun that was then never second guessed felt. So it just felt like it more authentically registered the realities of having a sort of complicated, or loud, gender.

The other bit that's informed my thinking about misrecognition has to do with the fact that even if one comes to inhabit a space where they're relatively consistently gendered, socially — and personally, I'm in the space where I get he/him'd almost all the time as I go about my daily life — the memory of that history of misrecognition is something that that I always carry with me. So even in moments of being consistently gendered in the way that I desire to be gendered, I am very acutely aware of how precarious that gendering has been historically and I also relate to every moment of gendering as something that is contingent, and in some respects still surprising, honestly, even if I could probably rely on it now. And I don't think that's the way that cis people experience pronouns, right? Like, there's something very specifically trans about that. So, a lot of my thinking about misrecognition is coming from this place of trying to think about what it means to have become habituated to systematic misrecognition over the course of one's life. And how that plays out just in terms of how we trust, who we trust, how we navigate social space.

S: Yeah. Building off of that trans people will sort of set themselves their own version of the real life test, by being correctly recognized or "pronouned" by a stranger, right? But you want to focus more on how we, as trans people, can create other ways of seeing and receiving each other, perceiving each other, supporting each other, that kind of operates in a different register. And one of the places that you're really working in Side Affects is through this idea of T4T, which you talk about as a strategic or contingent separatism, and it's where a lot of transition happens, where survival work and support happens, where trans world building happens. So I wonder if you could talk about that term T4T, and then what the way that you want to use it to think about what trans people are doing?

HM: Yeah. So the term, as far as I know — and this is the account that I've given in my writing on T4T — the term comes from Craigslist personals. So there were like the M4M, W4W, M4W, M4T and then T4T was just one of the iterations of that cognate. So folks seeking to hook up with folks of various gendered experiences have this option of being a trans person

looking for another trans person. And then it was taken up within trans cultural production as a way of naming this contingent kind of trans separatism. And I'm thinking specifically about Torrey Peters novella *Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones*, where there's a T4T tattoo that is a really important part of the plot, and T4T relationships that are central, like that whole book is just comprised of T4T relationships that are fraught and ambivalent and complicated. Non-utopic, definitively.

So T4T became a way of naming the kind of complex affinities and solidarities that circulate amongst trans folks, but also the way that trans folks are producing spaces with one another, that make the survival of social misrecognition possible. So part of the way that I think about this — although I don't think I've written about it expressly, has to do with Marie Lagunas' concept of world traveling, and actually Talia Mae Bettcher who is a brilliant trans thinker and philosopher has been writing specifically about world traveling in relationship to trans experience, so I want to mention her work here — but say that this idea of world traveling that comes from the scholarship of Maria Lagunas, has to do with not packing up your suitcase and actually moving literally around the globe, but this idea that on a day to day basis, we move between very different worlds of sense. And we are known very differently in those different worlds. So in the domestic space of my home, or when hanging out with close friends of mine, the forms of recognition that circulate there are very different from the forms of recognition that circulate when I enter a classroom or when I enter a faculty meeting or some sort of like academic DEI meeting — [Hil cracking up] your eyes got big when I said "DEI meeting" and I felt that. Yeah, spaces I happen to find myself in that are deeply troubling spaces.

So yeah, so those are all different worlds, right? And the sense that folks are able to make, and the kinds of recognition that are possible, are going to be very different from one of those worlds to another one of those worlds. But the phenomenon of world traveling between worlds, where we feel as if we are seen and witnessed and received in ways that are much more affirming, is what makes our ability to travel to more hostile worlds of sense, possible.

S: Yeah, that's interesting. I was thinking about that too, with the various experiences related to me by trans people who, during the initial lockdown of pandemic, were thinking about what their gender is like when they're alone or in that space, and people just being like "oh, when I'm just alone I don't even think, it doesn't really matter, I don't

think about it a lot". But this space was also a space where a lot of people who didn't identify as trans before found the place to transition, which is interesting. Like potentially an absence of other trans people to affirm that. So that was helpful for me just thinking about those spaces.

And just kind of relating that back to one of the moments that you analyze in the book, you talk about this idea — and maybe this gets to the way that trans people tend to find each other — you talk about this idea of "trans intercorporeality". Specifically you're looking at this moment in Casey Plett's novel Little Fish where there's a trans woman sex worker whose client is maybe someone who will eventually become a trans woman too, or be out as a trans woman, and the extra sort of work that that the character is doing for that person. But I really want to understand more about this intercorporeality that you're talking about, sort of how we co-produce our bodies together. Could you explain a little bit what you mean by that?

HM: So I was thinking really specifically about spaces of sexuality and desire when I was writing about that, although I think the intercorporeality is a phenomenon that is not necessarily erotic or sexual. But I was just thinking about how common it is for folks to have really affirming experiences around questions of gender in the context of sexual contexts before maybe ever actually taking steps towards surgical hormonal transition. The reason I talked about that scene in Casey Plett's work — on top of it just being a beautiful and really, really moving scene, and also a kind of traumatizing scene, as well, because of what happens both during and after that encounter. I won't spoil the book, but I'll just say you should read *Little Fish*, in part because of the scene because it's amazing, and poignant and hard — so I wanted to write about that scene, but I wanted to write about that scene in large part because it gets at this phenomenon of being brought into being, through a sexual contact, by somebody who just intuitively or intimately understands how you want your body to be related to, in relationship to questions of gender, that has nothing to do with how your body is actually aesthetically or visually manifesting, but it has to do with the way that it's touched in the language people use to refer to both the body sort of holistically, but also specific body parts.

I think that there's a "transing" that is possible in those spaces, or a kind of recognition that's possible in those spaces, that actually does really recalibrate one's sense of embodiment, one's inhabitation of the body

in the absence of questions of hormones and surgery. That has something to do with witnessing and touch and gesture and recognition that I think actually can manifest trans embodiment in the spaces where it happens. And that's a very different understanding of what makes a body trans or not trans, I think, but it also seems very, I don't know, just phenomenologically true. That happens.

S: That's interesting the way that you put it. I hadn't really thought that way about it but it makes me think about, one of the things I think about a lot is the limitations of our framework of consent in negotiating sexual encounters or whatever, and how you might not be able to, in that moment, say — like, the moment that you're analyzing in your book from Casey Plett is a moment where maybe that person is not really able to say these things about their desire, but the other person can recognize it without that language, right? And that for me kind of questions that idea of this verbal consent model, because you don't always have the language. You can't rely on the other person all the time in a sexual encounter to know these things, right? But this is like a special kind of circumstance where something happens outside of being able to talk about it. So yeah, I don't know, I hadn't thought about it that way. That's really interesting.

HM: I think it also happens in friendships, too. I mean, I imagine — and this is maybe again retrospectively imbuing meaning — but I just think about all of the friends I had as a kid and as a teenager, and they were of multiple assigned genders, but when I think about my dynamics with them, we were all just like rowdy little boys with each other. Yeah, and I mean, that was the space of intercorporeality that we produced, and how we navigated and inhabited our bodies in those spaces. So it happens there too, right? Just in this whole economy of gesture and relation, where there can be real intimate kinds of knowingness that exceed questions of gender norms or gender categories that become phenomenologically really fundamental, even if they're not done justice by language, right? There's a complexity that exceeds languages in those interactions that I find really important to think about, which is part of why I think trans phenomenology is a subspecialization, is so interesting.

S: And that's sort of what I was talking about when I was saying there's that retroactive aspect of transness. But like when I use that word to

understand myself, I could go back and be like, "all these things fall in place in a certain way that like I couldn't put together before, but now I can," and then you can start saying, "this was the logic underlying that I was unconsciously seeking out something and other people could see it without also having to say it, because there wasn't a space for it". Yeah, I love that way that you were talking about that.

But okay, also thinking about the T4T kind of community among trans people: one thing that I think is super important that you talk about is not idealizing our understanding of trans people, but when we talk about this, insisting on complexity. You say trans people can and do trigger each other frequently, like our trauma's kind of play out among ourselves beyond our control often. There's also the "horizontal hostility" that we see in trans communities, that's a phrase that you use, just thinking about how people kind of go after each other. I want to hear you talk about why we need to deidealize and wade into this sort of mess of transcollectivity and what that brings us. You mentioned a kind of "non-utopian" from the Torrey Peters work, so maybe you could talk about that, too, because you're saying that transness isn't redemptive in itself?

HM: Absolutely not. No, no. I think the best shot we have at building communities of resistance, that are resilient and effective, lies in getting to know one another deeply. Part of getting to know one another deeply is really leaning into and learning about the ways that we are fundamentally different from one another, and the kinds of antagonisms that crosscut and compromise our ability to really be present and supportive with one another. I think the only way to do that is by granting that there are these antagonisms that circulate within trans communities. There's no reason why I am necessarily going to be friends with somebody by virtue of the fact that they are trans and I happen to be trans, right. But we do have maybe something shared in the form of a political horizon we're working towards.

So I think it's real important to grant that solidarity can happen in the context of antagonism, and also that working through those forms of antagonism and horizontal hostility and mutually resonant triggering is, in a way, a kind of imperative political work, because it's what deepens coalitions, it's what deepens affinities. I mean, that's part of why I talk about T4T in that way. But I also think that it's just really important to think about how folks are positioned very differently structurally, and that

shapes the kinds of resources that people do or don't have to marshal, in the context of mutual aid work, in the context of building trans-affirming cultural spaces. I just think it's important to pay attention to that. Which is related, to go back to an earlier conversation, to why I think it's important to talk about transnormativity. Not trying to demonize anybody who understands their transition, and their gender and their embodiment, along more normative lines, but I just think it's important to point to the fact that there are like, I don't know, deep structural considerations that inform that psychic, emotional, effective and libidinal economy and understanding of selfhood.

S: In the context of care in particular, and burnout, in your books, you look at the way that we can get seduced by the romance of community — and this is something we've been invoking throughout this conversation, like there's a transcollectivity and trans community, but when you talk about it, you're like, actually, it's complicated it's messy. You take this term from Rupert Raj, of "gender labor" and how trans people are always doing this kind of gender labor for each other, whether it's in an official position, like Rupert Raj had at certain points, or unofficially like in our friendships. So I wonder maybe transitioning a little bit to the idea of care and this "gender labor" and the experience of trans burnout, can you talk a little bit about how you understand that and the kind of promise of community.

HM: I was talking recently with an NPR affiliate interview that I did with a show that's based in Dallas, Texas. It was a good conversation, but it was maybe the first time I've done an in depth interview with somebody who wasn't trans. [both laughing] So that was very new to me. Not only that, but somebody who was like a very, I don't know, normative white woman who was, you know, a radio show person? I don't know. I think you get what I'm saying.

S: Yeah.

HM: Like, it was a weird situation for me, because I was like, "these are not the people I'm normally in dialogue with, this is odd." But she had this kind of epiphany in the middle of the conversation, where she was like, "it just occurs to me how much mental and emotional space is freed up by not having to think about gender all the time. Like, I never realized

that that was a privilege I had." I just laughed bitterly. I was like, "oh, yeah, no, that's for sure". Like, imagine. When I think about what else would be possible in my life if I hadn't had to fucking think about this shit all the time and work on this, and engage in voluntary gender labor or gender work, what else I would have done? I don't know, because that's not what I did. That's not what I felt called to do or had to do.

But there's a truth to that, and that means that I think sometimes you just hit peak gender exhaustion [cracking up] and maybe the last thing some of us want to do in those moments is be around people who remind us of that, or be around people who are similarly sort of suffering from that peak gender exhaustion. Or maybe you want to be around those folks, but just not talk about it. And part of why you want to be around those folks is because you can be with them and not talk about, just have it tacitly understood that it is exhausting.

I think that horizontal hostility within trans communities is in large part, underwritten by or maybe directly shaped by, the exhaustion that comes along with having to do this kind of work all the time. The emotional labor of managing people's reactions to your gender, as you present it in the world, the work of attempting to carve out spaces that are affirming in the context of your work life, or your domestic life, or the social spaces that you inhabit. So I think that folks are really exhausted, folks are really burnout, and it does mitigate, or ameliorate, possibilities for political resistance when folks are at capacity all the time. I think, it seems to me like that's a reality for trans folks in the US at this moment.

S: That made me think about a potential parallel I see in anarchist spaces. Where the older, maybe not in the years, but the people who've been doing it longer, trying to figure out how to get people in. So I see the parallel with anarchism and transness because in the last number of years, moments of radicalization has brought people into anarchist organizing, like the George Floyd Uprisings, going back to Trump, etc. And then also more trans access to knowledge about transness that's brought more people into transitioning, and you can see how new people undertake this. You can look back and be like "they're on this stage of the journey". So there could be sort of frustration. And it's another form of gatekeeping when you look back and try to narrativize someone else's incoming. But this is also this place where there's a lot of people coming in, you want to welcome that and you might not have the capacity for it. I don't know. Yeah, I don't know if I have a question.

It just made me think about that parallel a little bit for radical organizing, or anarchists organizing and transitioning. Maybe it's just because of my age, too. I'm just like, "oh, the young people are in this place" and like, you get to the place where you can think about it in a different way, maybe after you get knocked down a few times.

HM: Totally. I think there's also a growing preoccupation with making these forms of work sustainable over the long term, and I mean for transness, forms of trans living, sustainable over the long term. And I think that's where intergenerational connection and dialogue and communities of support become really imperative. So folks aren't having to reinvent the wheel either in terms of tactics, like organizing tactics, or in terms of just understanding how to access resources and build collective resilience. And wealth is not the word I want to use, but structures of sustainability that enable life to go on. I think I was not concerned with that when I was in my my teens and 20s, particularly, but now that I'm approaching 40, I'm like, "oh, yeah, if we're in it for the long haul, we need to figure out how to build the long haul, together without intensifying the forms of burnout and exhaustion that are already so rife."

S: Right. I mean, for the people on the older side of that spectrum — also, there's that desire to be sort of stable and maybe have some comfort or rest, whatever comfort you can from a horrible space and moment that disinclined you to continue the processes of organizing, or even just like helping shepherd younger people through their experiences. Yeah, it's another one of the kind of seductions I guess of normativity too, right? Though, I think with that being less and less available to people we'll see a shift. It's weird in this moment to be like, "everything is really under attack and yet I, currently, right now, am safe, and not personally under attack." Like, that kind of weird dissonance.

HM: Yeah. And then the divide between youth and adults in terms of what will happen legislatively, legally, in terms of access to technologies of transition. I have big question marks about how that's going to transform the transpolitical landscape in the coming years. I'm thinking specifically about there's like a feature on Chase Strangio that came out a few weeks ago, where — you know Chase Strangio is known for being like the trans lawyer, doing all these like high profile civil litigation cases, or civil liber-

ties cases — and he says in this interview, you know, "extra legal networks of care are going to become increasingly imperative for trans people, because of the way that legal networks that provide trans affirming care are going to just be consistently chipped away at given the structure of the court system in the US." I don't know, ever since I read that profile — which is a great profile — but ever since I read it I've had that just sort of spinning around in my head, and thinking about how to build for that now. What can we do now to make sure that those networks of care and mutual aid are as robust as they can be when we really are going to need to access them?

S: That's interesting to hear that coming from him too, because of the work that he does. This is something I've been thinking about, and maybe if you have more thoughts on it, the fact of these policy measures, and just legislative attacks, or executive orders, or whatever, that are specifically targeting trans people, trans youth...my fear is that that narrows a radical trans politics into just countering the state on the state's playing field. Which the abortion situation shows us doesn't work, right? Because whatever gains Roe v Wade made for abortion, were just reversible whenever, at the whim of the state. And there's nothing this political system is going to do to protect that. So that's my fear, like if we just go to counter the state and be like, "we assert our rights as trans people," then we narrow those radical horizons. I wonder if you have thoughts about sort of, I don't know, maybe this is where your idea of the infrapolitics of care comes in too, and thinking of care as a form of self defense. Yeah, I don't know, I'll just turn it to you. If you have ideas about how to respond to this moment.

HM: There's a real southern specificity to my thinking about this. Having grown up in Florida, and then lived in Georgia, in Tennessee, and then Indiana, which is not the South, but is just north of Kentucky, right, and now living in Pennsylvania, which is not the South, but just north of West Virginia, and still in Appalachia, I think a lot about — both in relationship to questions of abortion access and reproductive justice more broadly, and also in relationship to questions of accessing transformative care — how for folks in these spaces that are not sort of coastal cities, coastal megalopolises there have had to be long standing networks of care and mutual aid, that facilitated access to reproductive care, and that facilitated access to transition for folks. So if you live in a state where if you work for

either a private company that is not trans affirming, or public institution that is explicitly trans exclusionary, like is the case for so many people in the southeastern US, although not exclusively there, then your access to medical care has always relied on things like crowdfunding, or marshaling broader community resources or the resources of friends and loved ones who are willing to help you pay for specific surgeries or for access to hormones that you might be paying entirely out of pocket for.

I'm also thinking about things like abortion doulas in the southeast and the necessity of doing abortion doula work. Those networks already exist in spaces that have not had easy access to transition, to reproductive technologies historically, and I think that that's where we need to look for lessons about how to organize in the future. I feel like I have a lot more to say about this, but I'm just gonna let it stay there for right now. I think it's really imperative right now to look at the people who have been doing this extra legal organizing for a very long time, because their work has served multiply marginalized and structurally disenfranchised communities, and think like, "Okay, well, how do we replicate this? How do we learn from this? How do we not reinvent the wheel?" And actually tap the wisdom that I don't know is already there?

S: Yeah, I think that's a really important point and it points to the sort of risks of the legalization avenue, which then is sort of one of the main logics of the state. They incorporate things so then you become dependent on them for access to them, and then we lose the sort of those traditions of, you know, community care that were there before and the memory of them too.

HM: Yeah, I mean, I think that's why the South is so interesting. because those are spaces where it's unnecessary to maintain those networks. Because even though Roe v. Wade happened 50 years ago, the ability to determine one's, how do I want to put it, basically the ability to decide how and when one has kids, has never been easy to access for folks in the South. The gains of Roe v. Wade have been chipped away at from the moment that it passed in the 70s in southeastern states. Rhose networks already exist there. And now's the time, I think, to invest in them more heavily. Also for folks who are not in spaces where these networks have had to, of necessity exist, to think about how they can be replicated in spaces where they might be newly necessary or necessary again, in a way they haven't been for decades.

S: So I was really taken with your discussion of envy in *Side Affects*. You're really careful to say that we need to think of it not necessarily as a moral or personal failing, which is how it's often presented, but that it's an index of injustice that frames our political relationship to our own desires. And I really like this quote that you say, that "envy might be an incipient revolutionary consciousness". And then the other thing that's really compelling to me is this idea that envy could be an alternative to dysphoria as grounding, the affect and experience of tranness. So I wonder if you could talk a little bit about, just giving us a taste of your discussion of bad affects, like your understanding of envy, and what role it plays in our daily lives, but also the political horizons?

HM: Yeah, I mean, with envy, I think that chapter started just because I became really preoccupied with: why was it that I'd been told, and I think a lot of people are told, that it's bad to want? Just bad to want, full stop. But also for trans folks, it's bad to want the things we want in terms of our embodiment, and in terms of the way that we're known in the world. And that has been the sort of motor of such intense guilt and shame for me personally, and I think probably for other folks, that it became really important to think about why I might want to reject it. And why it might be important to actually say, "No, I don't need to feel bad for the forms of envy and the forms of desire that are tied to that envy, that have informed the way that I live in what I desire. Maybe it's okay to embrace them, and what would happen if I did embrace them?" That's related to dysphoria, because dysphoria — and the way that I understand it, and there are probably other ways to understand dysphoria, I'm not saying mine is the only way or the exclusively right way — but the way that I have understood dysphoria is a term that indexes feeling really particularly not great about the gender you've got, and then wanting, wanting desperately to change it. But the emphasis lies on, I don't know, this individual experience of just being like, "I don't want the body that I'm in, I don't want to be in this body any longer."

Envy to me seems more promising because it's like, actually about what we desire, what we want, not about the feeling of just being dysphoric and feeling terrible about that. Conversations about desire are way more compelling to me than conversations about dysphoria [laughs]. So I felt like if we embraced envy, and then thought, why is it that we've been told that we need to feel bad for wanting the things that we want? What would it mean to reject that, and instead, say, "it's fine to desire the things

that we desire, and actually, the problem is that they're structurally foreclosed. Not that we desire them."

S: You use the example from Lou Sullivan, in the journals, writing about, I think, Paul and Ringo from the Beatles — that's such a sort of formative trans experience of being like, "am...do I want...am I attracted to this person? Do I want to be this person? Is it both of those things?" Which I think is really a way more expansive understanding of what gets labeled as "dysphoria" that feels like, when you talk about that way, it feels horrible, but then you're like, "oh, it's this question of desire that I can't fully understand." That's like, to me, like, I don't know, more joyous in some way.

HM: Yeah. I mean, to insist on the ability to explore and experiment with that desire seems really, really promising in a way that embracing dysphoria conceptually just doesn't. I think I've been very mad about the ways in which the ability to experiment with certain kinds of desires has been structurally foreclosed. Talking about envy as an indicator of structural injustice opens up a space to think about how the struggle might be...how do I want to put it? This is tricky for me to sort of wrap my brain around, this is just a sign that I'm still thinking about envy, and I don't have it all figured out, but if we understand certain forms of envy to be indicators of structural injustice, then the emphasis is on what needs to transform structurally, what we can do to transform structures that make the experimentation with certain kinds of desires impractical or impossible.

S: I mean, I think this is why I really like your use of transition as this unending process of becoming. Because with envy, it can be this mobile desire, where dysphoria is like, "oh, there's a cure to that and cure to that is to become this other gender that's stable," but the envy maybe keeps shifting. Which is true for a lot of trans people I know, their experience of how they inhabit their body and gender changes over time. It's not like they've landed there. Then in terms of the way you frame it "the index of an injustice," I try to think a lot about like luxury from a sort of radical or anticapitalist perspective. It's like, we deserve it and we want it. We want what we want, and we deserve what we want. So the way you frame it just gels with that kind of idea for me.

Maybe to use this as transition to an ending question from my anarchist perspective, too, because I think transition is an unending

process, to me, also parallels my understanding of anarchism, which is not a goal but a sort of way of relating to relationships in the world. I hold on to this horizon of gender abolition, which maybe seems like an endpoint, because thinking of the current gender regime that we live under, as a production of, as we've discussed, from the beginning, racial capitalism and colonialism, settler colonialism. There's a way that you talk about it in the book that I feel like we can see this idea of gender abolition, running the risk of a kind of idealization of some "genderless utopia", and also maybe losing the sort of daily life experience of what it means to be trans in this current regime. So I just wonder what your thoughts are on gender abolition and how it might fit into radical trans politics.

HM: Yeah, this has become complicated in recent days, because I found out that some TERF's are using the phrase "gender abolition" in ways that, like anarchist trans people have not understood. So using it to just mean the abolition of the concept of gender in favor of this defensive, dimorphic biological sex. I want to be very clear from the outset that the TERF uptake of the phrase "gender abolition" is very, very real to me and that has me wondering about whether it's a phrase I still want to utilize, like to wrest it back from them, or not. I just want to mention that, I haven't come out one way or the other on that.

I will say that, you know, gender abolition has always been — I think this is a horizon that I share with you — it's always been something that I've thought about, that I've maybe wanted, that I've maybe lusted after, politically and otherwise. How I understand it, it's not that folks would cease to have gender, or that there wouldn't be a multiplicity of genders that were were recognized socially and were legible in terms of the way that we interacted with one another, but really, rather that binary gender at the level of institutions, at the level of social structures was abolished. So we wouldn't have gendered forms of ID, we wouldn't have gender segregated spaces that make circulating socially very impracticable for gender nonconforming folks and trans folks. So these sorts of things, right, like abolishing gender at the structural and institutional level, no longer using it as a litmus in the context of surveillance and monitoring populations. What would that open up? I think what it would open up is probably a much greater ease of moving through the world for many people.

Anecdotally, and you probably have been aware of this too, every

time there is an architectural shift to make bathrooms, single stall and non gendered/gender neutral, everybody wants to use those bathrooms because they're just fucking better spaces [both laugh]. So to me, that's one small instance of a gender abolitionist project that actually ends up being much better for everyone regardless of how they identify. I think on a broader scale, forms of gender abolition structurally and institutionally will just produce more and more of those kinds of spaces.

The other thing I want to say just sort of maybe jokingly, I would be really, really happy to never use a men's room again in my life [Hil cracks up]. Yeah, I mean, it's terrible [Scott laughs] I don't know, like, what are cis men doing? It's awful [they both crack up]. For that reason, too, I would love to see gender abolished structurally institutionally.

S: No. Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. I mean, you're talking structurally and institutionally, but it also is refracted in — I don't know, I think about just watching kids and the sort of policing of gender that kids are sort of deputized to do. I don't even think they know what they're doing and they're suffering at the same time. That's a place where gender abolition, I could see it really having a clear material effect, where that work doesn't have to be done. Like anyone can play any way that they want in whatever moment without having to be like, "you shouldn't be doing that, because you're a boy or a girl."

HM: I mean, again, it's like just opening up these spaces of experimentation and spaces where desires are possible, and can be manifested. I think that's where I would like to see us go. And that's what gender abolition has always kind of named for me. And maybe we want to use another term now, or in the future. But I still think that project is absolutely imperative.

S: Well, yeah, thank you so much. I think that's a good place to sort of leave it. I'm really grateful for your time and the work that you're doing. And thanks for sharing your ideas. Is there any place that you want to direct listeners to get access to your work or your ideas?

HM: Yeah, so *Trans Care* was published open access so that's available online through Manifold for anybody who wants to read it. As for the books, so I've got three books out, my first book, *Queer Eembodiment: Monstrosity, Medical Violence and Intersex Experience*; then *Trans Care*; and now *Side Affects: On Being Trans and Feeling Bad*. So buy them at

your local radical bookstore and if you don't have a radical one, just an independent one [chuckles].

S: Yeah. Well, thank you so much for talking with me today.

HM: Yeah, no it was so great. It was so great to connect to and we should totally keep in touch in the future.

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